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CHAPTER FIVE

The Web of Family Ties

In the social structure of Indian village communities the family occupies by far the most important place. It derives its significance not merely from its economic functions and its dominant role as an agency of socialization and social control, but its ritual importance is also very great to the average Hindu.

Classical Hinduism has prescribed four stages of life: celibacy (*brahmacharya*), family life (*grahastha ashrama*), resignation (*vanaprastha*) and renunciation (*sanyas*). In the first stage a person acquires concentration by controlling his instincts and impulses so that he may be able to dedicate himself to the pursuit of learning. This is the formative period of life, and in it a man is expected to equip himself for the proper discharge of his social responsibilities. In the second stage he enters life and begins to share his social obligations. Now he must marry and beget children. This is the creative period and covers a very considerable part of a man's life. The last two are the contemplative stages. As a preparation for the ultimate renunciation of worldly goods and worldly connections, he should first cultivate an attitude of detachment and devote himself to reflection. When this has been achieved, the time will have come for him to renounce formally all his possessions and relations. In contemporary rural India very few people can understand or explain the social philosophy that lies behind this system of *ashramas* or the 'stages of life', but its essence has reached them for countless generations through oral tradition and through the teachings of numerous saint-poets and has thus become ingrained in their thought-pattern and value-structure. Sex indulgence among children is socially disapproved in the Indian countryside. Marriage is universally regarded as

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natural and necessary. Only morons and cripples remain single. Though it is rare for people to renounce their home and property in old age, old men and women excessively attached to material goods come in for a good deal of criticism, and people often remark about them, 'Will they carry their wealth with them to the other world when they die?' It is at this time that their thoughts turn more to religion and to the destiny of their souls in the future life, and it is now that they generally undertake pilgrimages to holy places. In a sense the broad essentials of the philosophy of the *ashramas* can be said to permeate the life and thought of the Hindu villagers. The village Muslims share these social attitudes with their Hindu neighbours. With conversion to Islam they have changed their religious faith, but in the socio-cultural spheres of life they still continue to have more or less the same basic attitudes as the Hindus. In their family ethics and ideals the two groups demonstrate considerable similarity.

To the village people the necessity of both marriage and family is self-evident. It is necessary that the family line should be continued. A male heir must be left. An unmarried person past the marriage age is an object of pity. A couple without a son are unhappy. Childlessness and inability to produce a male child on the part of a woman often lead to a polygynous household. Marriage is regarded as essential among all the castes and social groups in the village. In a community of 2,494 persons, demographic survey reveals the presence of only two single persons—both women. One of these is a deaf-mute; the other has been a victim of epileptic fits from her childhood and has in addition the unenviable reputation of being a thief. For the clean-caste Hindus the continuity of the family line is necessary for a further reason. A male child must make a ceremonial offering of water to the spirits of his deceased parents and ancestors, without which their souls may not have peace. The untouchable castes as well as the semi-tribal groups also have this ritual in a modified form. The Muslims neither have this belief nor any attendant ritual, but they too share with the Hindus the sentiment against childlessness.

I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY

The patrilineal and patrilocal elementary or joint family is the normal type of family unit met with in this part of rural India.

bad way, the elders of the allied families are expected to intervene. 596
Scandals or dishonourable behaviour in one unit are likely to spoil the name of all the allied families, and as such tradition enjoins elders to advise, warn and even admonish the erring members. A young man given to excessive drinking, gambling or any similar vice would often be admonished by the elders of this extended family. If he cannot keep his wife under control, or if the quarrels (626)
of the two become very frequent and too public, the neighbours would convey the information to the elders of the extended family and expect them to use their initiative in putting things right. In all such cases they will be within their customary rights if they intervene. They can demand that their advice is heard and followed.

Within the family unit the eldest male is generally regarded as the head. His wife or the next senior male is given the second place. A respectful son very often describes his old widowed mother as the 'head' of the family. However, in many cases the *de facto* head of the family may be a son under whose guidance and supervision the land is cultivated or the craft or profession of the family is practised. Parents dominate the scene in their youth and early middle age. With approaching old age they gradually recede to the background. Nominally they remain the heads of the family, but their sons are left more or less free to conduct the management of the family property and profession as they like. As long as the father remains the real head of the family, the internal management of the family remains the charge of the mother. Sons are expected to obey her and the daughters-in-law are expected to carry out her instructions. Any failure or reluctance on the part (606)
of a daughter-in-law to carry out the wishes of her mother-in-law leads to constant quarrels and complications, and in many cases to ultimate separation. Between sons and daughters, as a rule, preference is shown to the former, but if the sisters have considerable seniority in age, their younger brothers are expected to respect and obey them.

In the village community of Shamirpet, which has considerable 829
variations of caste and class, and significant differences in educa- 565
tion and urban contacts, it is only natural to expect great varia- 593
tions in the family ideals and ethics of the different groups. In the themes of their idealizations, the different sections of the population show striking similarities; but in their attitudes and reactions

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to specific social situations the different levels present remarkable contrasts.

For the purposes of such comparison, the population of the village may be broadly classified into three levels:

(1) *Upper Level*: comprising the 'twice born' castes of Brahmins and Komtis; rich Reddis and Muslims; and others who have had urban contacts or education in the city.

(2) *Intermediate Level*: all ordinary agriculturists; clean occupational castes and Muslim tradesmen constitute this group, which is by far the largest in the village.

(3) *Lower Level*: all the poorer sections of the population, such as the untouchable Malas and Madigas, and semi-tribal Vaddars and Erkalas, as well as poor Muslims, can be placed in this category.

With their urban contacts and education, as well as considerations of 'respectability' befitting their class, the people on the upper level set sufficiently high standards of behaviour. The stereotyped idealizations of the other two levels of population closely resemble the ideal-patterns of the upper level.

All three levels regard solidarity, co-operation and understanding as the essential attributes of the family that may be regarded as a model for the whole community. The ideal family should work on the principle of 'one for all, and all for one.' Different members of the family should function like an organized team, and have mutual trust and understanding. Toleration, goodwill and a sense of give-and-take among its members are necessary for the well-being and prosperity of the family. On the other hand, dissensions, conflicts and lack of understanding lead a family to its downfall.

There is unanimity in all three levels that the structure of the family is founded on its recognition of four basic principles. These are:

(1) Respect for age.
(2) Respect for position in the scale of kinship.
(3) Superiority of the male.
(4) Necessity of keeping certain family matters confined to the responsible members of the family, or at the most, within the family.

Further, in all three levels the importance of compromise as a

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tool for correct ordering of intra-family relations is emphasized. Mediation and reconciliation are regarded as the best methods of getting over family difficulties; timely partition of property and separation as the next best.

The people in the upper level not only believe in these ideals, but most of them consciously strive to achieve them in actual practice. A Brahmin will lose respect in the community if he gives up these noble ways and starts imitating the 'animal-like ways' of people on the lower levels. Prosperity of the Komti traders and money-lenders can be built up only when the whole family makes a concerted effort for it. A family of substantial agriculturists can further augment its land and improve its financial status by working hard as a team. This is equally applicable to both Hindu and Muslim agriculturists. People with urban contacts and education have also an urge to rise higher; and that necessitates solidarity, co-operation and understanding within the family. Great emphasis is laid here on correct behaviour towards different members of the family according to their age and kinship status. Disagreements must be expressed through permitted ways. Abuse and foul language should not be employed in referring to or addressing the elders. Any form of physical violence against them would be unthinkable and would cause great resentment in the other members of the family. Women on this level are generally kept confined to the home. Among the Muslims they observe strict *purdah*; among the Hindus for considerations of respectability it would be improper for them to go out to work. Thus they are largely confined to their houses. They have some ornamental value; nevertheless, in the entire social setting the comparative superiority of the male is latent. Family secrets on this level are always discussed in hushed tones, and all possible efforts are made to prevent them from leaking out. When husband and wife quarrel, the angry outburst must not be heard outside the home. If the husband beats the wife, her crying should not be loud enough to attract curious sympathizers into the house. The amours and intrigues of a member of the family, if they cannot be stopped, should at least be kept secret, and efforts should be made to prevent them from developing into open scandals. Mediation or arbitration by family elders is often effective for settling disputes within these families. If the misunderstandings and consequent difficulties seem to be beyond repair, property is gracefully

829 partitioned, and separation granted to the members who want to
565 secede from the family. This is sought to be done in an orderly
593 way, and every possible effort is made to ensure that the differences within the family do not become the subject of local gossip.

When we consider the actual behaviour of the people on the intermediate level, we find that many of these ideals are very considerably diluted. The value of solidarity is understood, but the willingness to make concessions and personal sacrifices for the sake of the family is not sufficiently strong to make it really effective. Age is generally respected, but in angry outbursts abuse
[201] may be showered on parents and uncles. Unable to control his temper one may even spit at them, or throw dust at them (symbolizing their burial, and thus indirectly wishing their death), or strike them. It would probably be necessary to express some sort of an apology for this unbecoming behaviour later, but the unrepentant individual can repeat it when he is provoked again. This type of behaviour is confined to a few individuals, and is socially criticized but none the less tolerated. Here too the superiority of the male is insisted upon, but the woman also works and is not tied down to many of the shackles of respectability. She does not lose face if she is beaten by her husband semi-publicly; occasionally she hits him back. She expresses her anger or suffering by running back to her parental home. In many cases some effort is made to conceal family secrets, but when passions rise, a father and son, or two brothers, but more often a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, will openly quarrel in the courtyard or the village lanes, and in the course of the hearty exchange of abuse these secrets may be broadcast by them at the top of their voices. Family differences are discussed privately and occasionally in public as well, but even when property is divided and separation is completed, mutual bickerings and exchange of harsh words continue for several months in most cases.

829 On the lower level the 'ideals' get diluted so much that it is
593 difficult to find any traces of them in actual practice. Division of
562 property and separation at this level are so frequent as to reduce
829 the conception of family solidarity to practically a meaningless ideal. On ritual occasions, respect is shown to people on account of their age or kinship status, but in everyday life one can ignore these considerations with impunity. Although theoretically the woman is inferior, at this level she enjoys much more freedom. She

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can work for wages and has considerable freedom of movement. Sexual lapses on her part are more liberally viewed. If the husband beats her, she too can beat him. If the abuses of her husband are loud, hers can be louder still. She can leave her husband and take another with comparative ease, and without any social stigma. This would permanently lower the status of persons on the upper level, and would be commented upon very adversely in the intermediate class. The family secrets are announced to the outside world by the members of the family itself in their open-air quarrels. Compromises are often made through mediation and arbitration, but may be disregarded with comparative ease after a few days.

It is probably needless to say that the above three levels are not fixed, nor are they exclusive. Modern education and other modern means of communication—especially the cinema—often infuse a spirit of romantic individualism into the youth of the upper level, who, rather than working for family solidarity, often disintegrate it. Education, urban contacts, 'disgust with rustic ways', and desire for greater respectability according to accepted social standards in some cases set in motion efforts at vertical movement in families on the lower levels.

2: INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE FAMILY

HUSBAND AND WIFE

According to the traditional norms of the society a husband is expected to be an authoritarian figure whose will should always dominate the domestic scene. As the head of the household he should demand respect and obedience from his wife and children. The wife should regard him as her 'master' and should 'serve him faithfully'. It is the husband's responsibility to provide adequately for the support and maintenance of 'his dependants' and the wife's duty is to 'run the household frugally and efficiently'. In an ideal home 'all major decisions are taken by the husband in consultation with his wife and grown-up children', but the final say in all matters connected with the family is always with the husband. The husband should 'watch the activities and ways of his wife' as well as 'take care of the proper upbringing of his children'. The wife should 'serve her husband with loyalty and devotion'. The husband is 'superior'; the wife is his 'subordinate'. As a mark of the recognition of his superiority, the wife shows respect to her

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554 sufficient scope for an individual to work his way towards the achievement of a new and higher status. While the social framework of caste is rigid and does not easily admit any variation in one's position in the traditional scale of social respectability, by taking recourse to the other factors a man can still improve his position and gain social prestige. In general it could be said that under the impact of modern socio-economic trends in the criteria for status differentiation there has been a swing from an ascribed status system to an achieved status system. However, the grip of the traditional system is still firm, and people from lower castes or others with humble origins must behave with considerable tact and discretion if they seek to enhance their influence and importance in the community. If such people acquire land, wealth, official position or some special skill by their own efforts, they can gain social prestige if they avoid ostentation and exhibitionism and insist on not transgressing the limits imposed on them by tradition. If such a man behaves with becoming modesty, people would say, 'Look, even wealth has not turned his head. He has not forgotten his low birth and traditional status. He is a good man. Such people always succeed in life.' On the contrary, display of self-importance and lack of courtesy on his part would lead to adverse comment. People would say, 'If a person of humble origin grows rich, his head is turned. Look at this man! Until the other day his father was a bricklayer. With a few hundred rupees in his pocket he behaves as if he owns the village.'

554 827 Birth, wealth and special personal qualities are marks of distinction, but they do not fall to the lot of the average man. The common villager regards self-sufficiency and stability as a mark of respectability. Here is a generalized picture of such a person in the words of one of our informants belonging to an average family of Reddi agriculturists: 'He is not rich, but he lives well and eats well. Quarrels are not heard in his home and there are no scandals about them. He lends to no one, but neither does he borrow from anyone. He is a contented man.' In the words of a Muslim cultivator, 'If you get enough to eat twice, if not thrice every day, if your wife and children have sufficient cloth to cover their bodies, and if you have a small house, a pair of bullocks and some fields of your own, there is nothing else that you should desire.' To quote one more informant, a Madiga untouchable: 'How many people can be rich? It is no blessing to worry half your life in order to

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amass wealth, and spend the rest of it worrying about its safety. The cultivator need not be rich. It is enough if he has not to lower himself before others begging for their favours.'

2. STANDARD OF LIVING: FOUR LEVELS

In Shamirpet four levels denoting different standards of living are vaguely recognized by the villagers. They are:

i. Rich.
ii. Well-to-do.
iii. Average.
iv. Poor.

It is difficult to lay down any precise rules to classify the different families living in the village into these levels on the basis of their standards of living. As these distinctions are based primarily on the differences in earning, it may be generally said that families with an income of Rs. 200 per month or more would be regarded as 'rich', those earning between Rs. 100 and 200 as 'well-to-do', those earning Rs. 45 to 100 as 'average' and those earning less than Rs. 45 as 'poor'. The average family unit in these calculations consists of five—three adults and two children.

According to this test which reflects the consensus of opinion in the village, our socio-economic survey of the community would indicate the following classification of the village population:

Rich	4%	Average	34%
Well-to-do	22%	Poor	40%

The following table indicates average percentage of consumer expenditure on different items, based on the family budgets of three consecutive years of a total sample of one hundred and twenty families representing the four levels of living:

ITEMS AND PERCENTAGE OF EXPENDITURE

Level	1 *Food (including fats and spices)*	2 *Clothing (including ornaments)*	3 *Feasts and ceremonies*	4 *Repairs and maintenance of the house*	5 *Luxuries (including tobacco and liquor)*	6 *Miscellaneous (entertainment, medicine, etc.)*
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Rich	34	15	18	11	12	10
2. Well-to-do	40	14	18	10	12	6
3. Average	48	12	12	8	15	5
4. Poor	56	10	11	5	15	3

From the above it is clear that on each successive lower level the percentage of expenditure on food—that is, on cereals, meat,

571 come forward very readily to help those who need it. It is common
157 to suspect others' motives; and not unusual to be always on the alert to read hidden meanings into the seemingly innocent utterances of others. Analysis of their life-histories shows that the people are not given to introspection. They are always on the defensive; but their inter-personal relations are not characterized by detachment. In their thoughts, likes and dislikes they are quite open, and all persons having even casual contacts have a fair acquaintance with one anothers' ideas and attitudes

827 It is not uncommon for people to analyse and describe the
[186] personality-traits of other inhabitants of the village as well as of
577 outsiders coming into the settlement. Positive qualities, having obvious approval, find expression in such epithets as: 'good person', 'hard-working', 'honest', 'respectable', 'well-behaved', 'intelligent', 'generous' or 'large-hearted' and 'faithful'. Epithets describing negative traits which do not meet with social approval are many and varied, and among others include: 'bad person', 'lazy', 'dishonest', 'shameless', 'mannerless', 'foolish', 'miserly', 'small-hearted', 'unfaithful', 'good-for-nothing', 'liar', 'all talk but
[521] no deeds', 'ill-tempered', etc. Analysis of such traits is firmly established in the culture-pattern, and occupies an important place in the conversation of the people when they meet in small groups.
[183] Although conformity to social norms is idealized and emphasized, when there is a breach of traditional ways the person responsible likes to confess it in confidence to someone else. Long conversations and the mutual sharing of secrets are quite frequent. However, when friendships break up the sanctity of earlier secrets is not protected by any code of honour. Within limits originality and innovation are admired; but excess and ostentation soon lead to social censure and ridicule.

827 Subjects coming under the critical eye of society are: (i)
626 breaches of traditional norms, (ii) display and exhibitionism, (iii)
577 sexuality, (iv) efforts to rise in the power hierarchy, (v) conspicuous success, and (vi) originality and 'too many new ideas'. Carrying tales and 'whispering about the doings in others' houses' go on in the community on a wide scale. It is criticized by the aggrieved persons and their sympathizers, but no one regards it as inherently bad. 'Incidents' or breaches of established norms are discussed in small conversational groups at first, and the more important ones among them gradually filter through and reach the respon-

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sible village elders. Few such breaches escape the attention of society, although in many of them no action may be called for by the caste or village elders. Display and ostentation are severely criticized in the community. Individuals inviting social censure for this fault are frequently nicknamed and mimicked. The behaviour of persons who have just come into wealth or a position of authority is subjected to a particularly critical scrutiny. Sexuality, in all its different aspects, provides another popular theme for gossip. Although bragging about unusual potency and sexual adventures is very common, in general the community watches and comments upon all abnormalities, particularly excessive indulgence and lack of adequate sex vigour. The comments of the group in this sphere too are merciless. Those who are on the higher rungs of the ladder of power hierarchy jealously watch their own position, and anyone casting a covetous eye on a position of influence at once becomes the target of the criticism of several pressure groups in the community. People attaining conspicuous success are invariably the subject of malicious criticism. Their actions and speech are closely watched, and later commented upon. Opportunities for taunting them are eagerly sought, and indirect references to their humble origin are frequently made. Finally, persons having too many novel and original ideas also invite the criticism of society. While people are unsparing in their comments, they are very much reserved in their praise.

Anger is freely expressed. Loud shouting, use of foul language, and occasional physical violence are the principal channels for the expression of aggressiveness. Sentiments of love and friendship too are publicly expressed; the only exception in this case being the suppression of all sentiments suggesting sexual intimacy.

Concepts of 'manliness' and 'defending the honour' play a significant part in governing inter-personal relations within the community. It is not manly to beat anyone who is too young, too aged, weak or infirm. On the contrary, a fight between equals is always considered fair; although it may necessitate action on the part of village elders. Notions of personal and family prestige differ in different castes, as well as at different income levels. Any challenge to personal prestige or family honour is bound to arouse a violent reaction.

Truth and straightforwardness are acclaimed as social ideals; but intelligent and ingenious ways of deception too receive

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government is indulging them; and for vote-getting the political parties are spoiling them. If things go on like this, in the future these low castes will want to marry our daughters and sisters,' remarked a Reddi agriculturist. Those standing nearby nodded their assent. The above remark is illustrative of the general attitude of 'responsible' persons in the higher castes.

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EDUCATED VERSUS UNEDUCATED

Adverse comments are frequently heard from the educated and uneducated people against each other. The uneducated especially have some stereotypes regarding the educated; and the latter often express derogatory opinions about the illiterate members of the community.

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Remarks echoing the following opinions and sentiments are commonly heard from the uneducated people: 'What use is education to us? After four years at the school all that our children learn is to hold a pen in their hands. What we really want them to learn is the holding of the plough firmly.' 'By learning to read a couple of books at the school the youngsters begin to think that they have in their skulls all the knowledge and learning in the world. They scoff at their parents, belittle the experience of the elders, and seem to think no end of themselves. Realities of life soon teach them a lesson. Sooner or later they repent and fall at the feet of the elders.' 'Everyone says, "Send your children to school; uneducated people are like animals; education makes them human beings." But what do we get out of education? Boys learn to read and write, but they forget the traditional ways. They do not want to cultivate the family land, and are ashamed of their traditional profession. They all want jobs in the city. If things go on like this what will be the future of the community?' 'The educated people excel each other in tall talk and boasting. They will drink, gamble and intrigue. There is nothing else that they can do.' 'What service do the educated people render to the community? They instigate simple illiterate people to quarrel, and later exploit the situation to their own advantage.' 'We village people are simple. Education makes us crooked.' In substance the average attitude boils down to this: education shakes a person's belief in the traditional ways and creates in turn new desires and ambitions; these factors operating simultaneously make the educated persons misfits in the community.

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On the other hand, the educated people think: 'The illiterate

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not without hesitation, misgivings, doubts and an initial resistance. The unfortunate class of people who are semi-rural and semi-urbanized find themselves rejected by both sides: they are held suspect by their fellow-villagers as demeaned by urban associations, and are looked down upon by their urban associates for their rustic ways. Petty government servants and town-returned village-folk are not expressly recognized as leaders of the community, but all the same they set the wheels of the community in motion in the direction of social change. It is through this class of people that urban items of regional culture, and several items of the national and Western cultures are brought into the community and hesitatingly absorbed into its life. Their selection or rejection naturally depends upon their need, utility, prestige-value and conformity with or opposition to the prevailing set of values in the community.

The village people have always idealized their traditional life-ways, and have shown unmistakable suspicion for those of the city, but have generally followed the lead of the élite, which formed the dominant social group, though sometimes with their own modifications and adaptations. The gradual adoption of Sanskritic ritual by the rural communities was the first major triumph of this group in the past. The process still continues, but now 'progressive' and 'modern' elements are gradually filtering in through the semi-urbanized village-folk.

To conclude, a few remarks may be made about the influence of these new trends on the ethos and world-view of the people.

The episodic, topical and complete life-histories recorded in the course of our investigations, supplemented by observation and records of conflicts and co-operative activities in Shamirpet, provide the material for these observations on the villagers' world-view. It is necessary to point out that so far no depth-psychology studies have been done in this area nor has there been any systematic attempt to study the cultural aspects of personality. In the absence of such studies, only an outline of the dominant attitudes and goals which are characteristic of the society can be attempted. In this context, following John Gillin, 'Ethos is taken to mean the constellation of acquired drives or motivations which are characteristic of a culture, plus the goals which are both explicit and implicit, towards which

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cultural activities are directed, or upon which high value is placed.'[1]

What is the universe according to the average way of thinking in this village community? Notwithstanding the historical traditions of the Andhra culture-area to which this village belongs, and the nearness of the settlement to the large cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad the universe in people's thoughts remains extremely limited both in time and space. Some educated persons, especially the Brahmin and the Reddis, have vague ideas about the cultural traditions of Andhra and of the glorious past of India, but to the great bulk of the people caste-mythology is their only history. Traditional social institutions and life-ways are idealized: they originated long, long ago when men first appeared on the earth and the salvation of people lies in their faithful observance of these divinely ordained ways. It is customary to criticize the change of times in so far as the present is concerned; but the idealized past does not have much depth—at the most it goes to the great-grandfather's generation and above that to legendary heroes of caste-mythology. The Muslims have a fair acquaintance with the history of the origin of their religion, but not of their own connections with it. While people know about the existence of several different cultures, languages and religions in India, and also something about the lands beyond the seas, have been to places of pilgrimage and a few have even seen some of the larger cities of the land; their mental horizon is definitely regional. The village, their own caste, villages in the neighbourhood and some of the developments in the nearby capital city—generally only those affecting the rural areas—constitute their effective universe. [186] The focus is local and regional, confined to family, kin, caste and some neighbouring villages. National consciousness is rather vague, and it was a surprise to us that in a village so near a large city there were many people who did not know the names of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and had only the haziest of ideas regarding the struggles of the Indian National Congress against British rule. Recent political changes in Hyderabad and activities of the different political parties have sought to widen this universe, but so far the change has been extremely limited. Newspapers, increased political activity, and compulsory educa-

[1] Sol Tax, ed., *The Heritage of Conquest*, "Ethos and Cultural Aspects of Personality" by Gillin, p. 195.

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tion will probably have modified this very considerably in a few decades.

The fundamental drive in the thought and activities of the group seems to be towards the goal of the adjustment of the individual to the universe. Several aspects of man's life are predetermined and he has to reconcile himself to his fate. But one need not therefore resign oneself to that fate, for actions in one's life-time can not only modify what has been predestined, but can also determine the course of life after death. Thus a life ordered according to the prescriptions of *dharma*, the traditionally approved 'correct way of life', mitigates some of the evils of the past and adds to one's merit which in its turn ensures happiness in this and future lives. The ideal pattern of adjustment with the universe is laid down by the *dharma* and comprises performance of sacramental rituals, observance of fasts and festivals, avoidance of acts and thoughts declared by religion as sinful, and rigid adherence to caste rules and taboos. Cheating in regard to some of the social and religious injunctions and prescriptions is practised, and is even regarded as permissible if it can be compensated with greater devotion in some other sphere. When such cheating becomes too open or hits the structural unity, stability and continuity of the community, it is punished; but as long as it remains personal and private one can hope to supplicate divine forces in other ways to win their forgiveness for some lapses and acts of omission and commission. All human acts are not attributed to individual volition; the unseen hand of destiny is found to motivate one's actions and decisions under many situations. Radical departures from traditional life-ways are often attributed to fate. On the whole rigid adherence to traditional life-ways is regarded as the ideal and most satisfactory method of adjustment with the universe and its unseen forces. Activities of political parties, particularly of the Communist Party, have tried to awaken people to a more positive attitude, not without total lack of success, but the new ideas are still greeted with frank dismay and scepticism and so far there has been very little change in their basic attitude towards life and the principal goal of the community, which still remains peaceful adjustment and adaptation to the laws that control the universe.

In inter-personal as well as inter- and intra-group relations, the people tend to view everything as hierarchically structured. All things, groups and people, must fit into higher, equal or lower

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829 554 levels. Castes are either superior, more or less equal, or inferior. This view extends to gods, animals and foods. This hierarchical setting does not denote status only, it denotes power as well. Thus people love to dominate; but they hate being dominated, and where they must accept domination of anyone higher, they in their turn seek to dominate all who occupy a lower position in the hierarchy. Man is superior to woman, therefore, she must obey him. But a mother is superior to children, to sons when they are not adults, and always to daughters and daughters-in-law, and she will therefore dominate them. A child must obey the elders, but he too can dominate a younger sibling. Superior castes can dominate inferior castes; the rich dominate the poor; those in authority dominate those who lack it. Age, kinship status, wealth and authority—together with caste—determine the superior and inferior statuses. When there are conflicts as a result of the desire to dominate in one, and hatred of domination in the other, either there is an open breach, or on 'respectable' levels there is a sort of vague compromise and adjustment under which the person with the superior status maintains the semblance of his authority by letting it become virtually ineffective and the person with the inferior status never challenges it seriously because in actual practice he does not feel its weight. Possessiveness and love of domination characterize most of the thoughts, ambitions and actions of the people, although under certain situations they are compelled to compromise with necessity and shed their power to maintain the fiction of their superiority. The new socio-political climate of the country has necessitated some adjustments and modifications in the nature of hierarchy and tone of domination; but basically the view of the people remains the same. As a concession to the changing times superior castes will not treat inferior castes harshly; but they still expect formal recognition of their superiority from the latter. A defiant low caste person would be subjected to several types of direct or indirect social presure; but one adhering to tradition and 'keeping his status in mind' would succeed in getting much better treatment.

829 The fundamental concepts of the rights and equality of men mean little to these people, whose visions are thus bounded by their own observation of the world. This is perhaps the most unexpected aspect of the village community for a Western mind to grasp, and it leads to its particular view of change. If people

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are asked to choose between tradition and progress, tradition would perhaps be their instinctive choice, although a second thought might induce them to take a few hesitating steps in the direction of change. Many still believe in a timeless present and take its continuity for granted notwithstanding its shortcomings and inequities; to many a deviation from tradition always signifies a deviation from the right way into a kind of blind alley. But the changing needs of time are also generally recognized, and while they will hold fast to the frame of their traditional structure, the people will not reject uncritically the benefits of new cultural elements. Indeed, from the readiness with which they have already adopted certain items of material culture, including Western medicines in so far as they are available, it is justifiable to predict that given suitable conditions the tempo of change would greatly increase.